

The History of Batchelors Grove



Schmidt Family Residence - 1890 - Bachelors Grove Cemetery

Bachelors Grove Cemetery & Settlement Research Center

The following was written by Brad L. Bettenhausen,

President of the Tinley Park Historical Society

The settlement at Batchelors Grove began as early as the late 1820s, with larger numbers of immigrants arriving in the 1830s and 1840s. The initial settlers were generally American "Yankees" of English, Irish, and Scottish descent, most of whom came here from New York, Vermont, and Connecticut. The second wave of settlers arriving from Europe, primarily of Germanic origin, began in the late 1840s and became the predominant nationality for immigrants to the area for better than the next fifty years.

At the Methodist Conference held in Jacksonville, Illinois in 1832, Stephen R. Beggs of Walker's Grove was assigned the charge of the DesPlaines Mission, which included Batchelor Grove located twenty miles south of Chicago. This clearly indicated that some significant settlement had already occurred in this vicinity prior to 1832. A Gazetteer of Illinois by J.M. Peck (1834, second edition 1837) contains the following listing: "Batchelder's Grove, in Cook County, eighteen miles southwest of Chicago, contains about two sections of timber, and a large settlement." Most of the early settlement in this area occurred near timberlands which supplied materials for construction and where the grassland prairies were easier to break and cultivate.

Most of the stands of timber in the area assumed the name of one of the early families that settled near them. In this vicinity, Walker's Grove, Gooding's Grove, Cooper's Grove, Blackstone's Grove are just a few of the timberlands named after individuals or families. As with these other groves, it is believed that this settlement was named from the family name of one of the early settlers near this stand of timber. Members of the Batchelder family are known to have been living in Rich Township by 1845, and it is extremely likely that Batchelor's Grove received its name from this family.

According to the claims of Stephen H. Rexford, who settled at "the Grove" in 1833 or 1834, the settlement was named for a group of four single men (including himself) who

settled there, and thus "Bachelors" Grove. Ferdinand Schapper's 1917 manuscript provides similar citing, noting: "About 1834 or 1833 several bachelors, among whom was Stephan {sic} H. Rexford, Eli B. Williams and possibly one or more of the Bartons settled there to perfect their titles for government land, as they were all single men and kept bachelors' hall the place became known as Bachelors Grove. It is about four miles southwest of Blue Island." Schapper includes the names of about 60 individuals who he noted as settling in or near Batchelors Grove between 1833 and 1850.

However, as previously noted, the Bachelor Grove name apparently was already in established use prior to the arrival of Mr. Rexford. Stephen Rexford established the first post office in the vicinity as Batchelor's Grove in 1843. The 1851 James H. Rees map of Cook and DuPage Counties also identifies the wood as Bachelor's Grove.



1851 James H. Rees Map

Stephen Rexford was involved in the organizing and naming the township governments of Cook County in 1850. At that time, the former Bachelor's Grove post office was renamed "Bremen" by postmaster Samuel Everden in recognition of the new township name in which the post office was located. This post office again changed its name to Bachelder's Grove in 1855 at the request of postmaster Robert Patrick and was

ultimately discontinued in 1858. The Bachelders Grove variation appears on an 1872 map of the area.

From information gathered from early records and maps, the Batchelor's Grove settlement encompassed areas in northwest Bremen Township, northeast Orland Township, southwest Worth Township, and southeast Palos Township. Many of the early settlers to "the Grove" would later be instrumental in the establishment, growth, and development of Blue Island.

In 1878, a post office was established as East Orland (after its location in the eastern portion of Orland Township) by Louis Groskoff {Groskopf} and covered a portion of the old Batchelor's Grove settlement. This post office was not far from Stephen Rexford's original 1843 post office location. In 1884, a post office named Goeselville was established by Christian Goesel, Sr. which replaced East Orland and operated until 1903.

The Goeselville settlement centered around the vicinity of 147th Street and Oak Park Avenue (formerly known as Bachelors Grove Road, and also as a continuation of Ridgeland Avenue for a time). Both East Orland and Goeselville refer to areas that were previously known as Batchelors Grove. Interestingly, "Goeselville" can still be seen on many current maps, atlases, and gazetteers of the area. Also from its founding in 1859, Trinity Lutheran Church in Tinley Park, was known from time to time as the church at Batchelor's Grove.



Batchelors Grove Road, Image Courtesy of Mark Rehak

Although now inactive, Batchelors Grove cemetery is one of the oldest cemeteries in south Cook County. Its legal location description is 1 acre in the East 1/2 of the Northwest 1/4 of Section 8, Township 36 North, Range 13, East of the Third Principal Meridian (Bremen Township, Cook County, Illinois) Or, more simply, it is across from what is now called the Rubio Woods Forest Preserve on 143rd Street just east of Ridgeland Avenue. It is down a trail that was originally a section of the old Midlothian Turnpike that has been closed to vehicle traffic since the 1960s.

According to Ferdinand Schapper's 1917 manuscript, Southern Cook County and History of Blue Island before the Civil War, the first burial in the Everdon's Cemetery at Batchelors Grove was that of Eliza (Mrs. Leonard H.) Scott in November 1844. However, the earliest death date noted in the newspaper "Pioneers In Peaceful Rest, Bachelor's Grove, One of First Cemeteries; Lies Serene, Undisturbed" that appeared in the Blue Island Sun-Standard published in Blue Island, Illinois on August 16, 1935, was that of William B. Nobles who died in 1838. The last burials to take place in the cemetery are believed to have been that of Laura M. McGhee in 1965, and Robert E. Shields in 1989 who was cremated and buried on the family plot.

Pioneers In Peaceful Rest

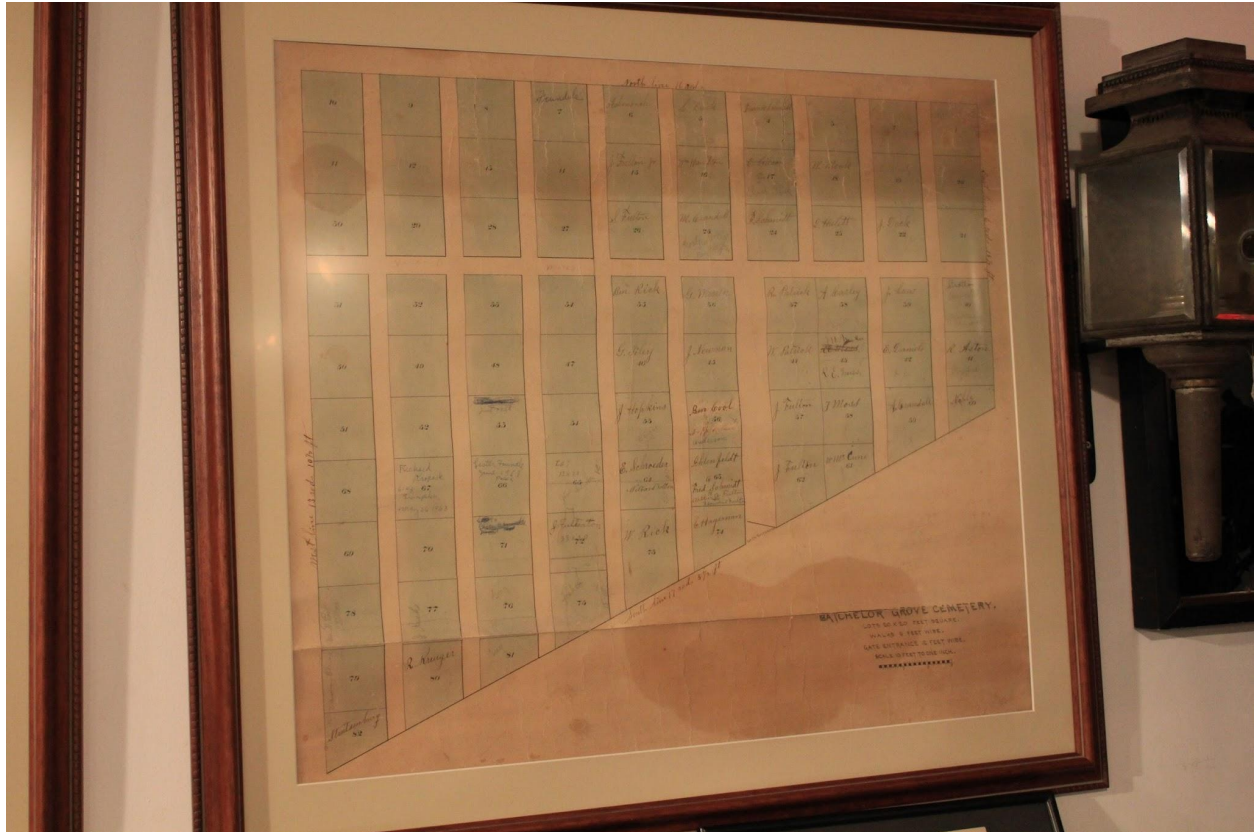
Bachelor's Grove, One of First Cemeteries; Lies Serene, Undisturbed

Blue Island Sun-Standard - August 16, 1935

The first legal record of the cemetery occurred when Edward M. Everden sold his property in the area to Frederick Schmidt in 1864, reserving and setting aside one acre of the land for use as a graveyard. According to the 1935 newspaper articles, Fredrick

Schmidt supposedly added additional property to expand the cemetery in subsequent years, however there is no hard evidence of any additions to the original acre. It is also mentioned in a response to the newspaper article "Pioneers In Peaceful Rest, Bachelor's Grove, One of First Cemeteries; Lies Serene, Undisturbed" stating, "Relatives of Mr. Everdon wish it to be made plain that the one acre or so of original cemetery was in existence prior to the Schmidt ownership." The 1864 deed and subsequent property transfers only indicate that the cemetery was one acre in size, neglecting to give the dimensions of the cemetery itself. A deed from 1909, where a portion of the Schmidt property was sold, provides some points of reference to the cemetery's legal description.

The last "independent" cemetery trustee was Clarence Fulton of Tinley Park, whose family were early settlers of Bremen Township (arriving in 1844), many of whom are, or were, buried in the cemetery. After his death, a large plat map of the cemetery was donated by his family to the Tinley Park Historical Society which is believed to reflect who many of the burial lots had been sold to. A photocopy of a nearly identical plat map, with similar lot markings, was found in the files of the Cook County Real Estate Management Office. It is believed that both maps date to the 1870s. The photocopy map indicates that it was surveyed and drawn by Eugene Franklin McClintock, who was a grandson of Thomas McClintock, an early settler at Batchelors Grove. The original map at the Tinley Park Historical Society is also believed to have been drawn by Mr. McClintock. Both plat maps give the boundary dimensions of the cemetery, but no point of reference to its specific physical location. Additionally, another drawing was donated to the Tinley Park Historical Society by the Fultons, which showed a plan for a new cemetery entrance off of 143rd Street after the Midlothian Turnpike was closed to vehicle traffic in front of the cemetery in the 1960s. This plan was never executed, presumably because easement through the surrounding Forest Preserve property could not be obtained.



Original Cemetery Plat Map - Tinley Park Historical Society

Even before the closing of the Midlothian Turnpike, the cemetery was becoming a favorite hangout for area youth as a lover's lane and for drinking parties. Once the cemetery became further isolated with the closing of the road, vandalism of the cemetery accelerated. There has been evidence of satanic rituals and attempts at grave openings and robberies from time to time, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s. Desecration and vandalism of the cemetery reached a peak in the 1970s. Many stones were maliciously broken, defaced, spray painted, and stolen. It is believed that many of the missing stones have ended up at the bottom of the nearby quarry pond. In a newspaper article, Clarence Fulton indicated that grave markers were found in Maywood (Cook County Sheriff Police Headquarters), Evergreen Park, and even Chicago Police Headquarters. Whatever happened to these "recovered" markers is

unknown. Mr. Fulton had noted that during those "turbulent" years, if they had been returned to the cemetery, they would only have been stolen again.

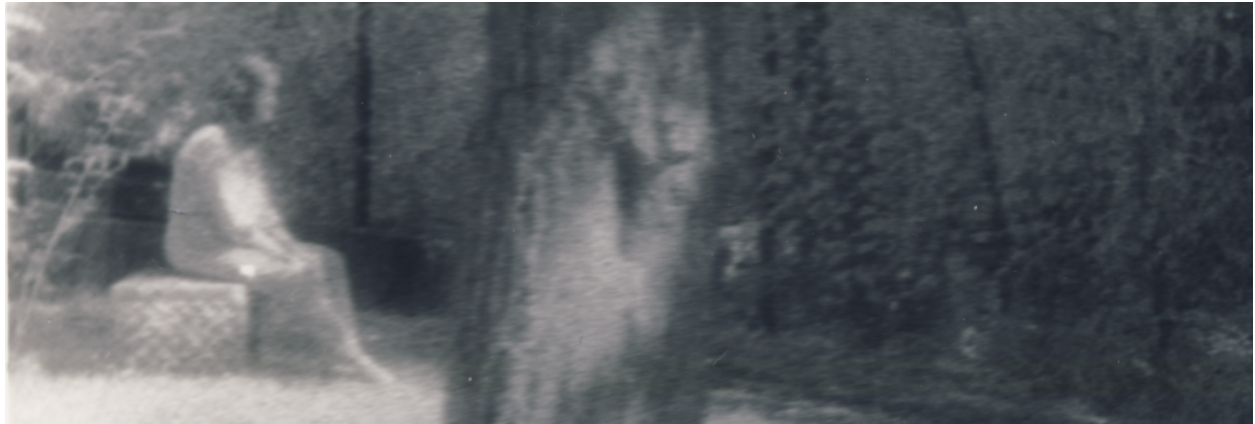


Police Patrol - Batchelors Grove Cemetery - 1966

According to Clarence Fulton's reminiscences, Batchelor Grove Cemetery was like a park, and you could fish or swim in the adjacent quarry pond. He noted that families would often go to the cemetery on Sundays and have a picnic while visiting their loved ones buried there. The cemetery still presents a peaceful park-like setting, and you can often find individuals fishing in the quarry pond. However, it is doubtful that you will find

many who would be willing to swim in the murky waters of the pond, or choose to picnic in the isolated cemetery today.

There are numerous tales of horror that supposedly occurred at the cemetery, that have been told and retold by several generations of youths, however, few of these tales have any apparent basis in fact. There are also a number of reports of hauntings, and apparitions in and around the area of the cemetery. Ghost watchers delight in these stories of a strange floating blue light, a brilliant zooming red light, a mysterious ghost house, phantom cars that appear and disappear, human ghostly apparitions, and other paranormal activities. However, here too, it appears that many of these reports have greater basis in local folklore than in verifiable occurrences.



Purported Apparition - Captured by Jude Huff - August 10, 1991

Periodically, families with ancestors buried at Batchelor Grove had the bodies moved to other cemeteries, that were more prestigious, closer to where they lived, or where there was more room for future family members. The cemetery's isolated location and the vandalism of more recent years also compelled some families to move relatives to other active cemeteries. The first known documented relocations date to the late 1880s. Some families, such as the descendants of John Fulton, Jr., have erected new cenotaph (memorial) markers at the cemetery where other family members are located (Zion Lutheran Cemetery, Tinley Park), leaving the ancestors and their remaining original markers at Batchelor Grove.

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The cemetery is now under the supervision and responsibility of the Cemetery Trustees (under the Real Estate Management Office) of the Cook County Board. The County Board was approached by an aged Clarence Fulton in the fall of 1975 to take charge of the care and maintenance of the old cemetery. Mr. Fulton had previously requested Bremen Township's assistance in caring for the cemetery in 1967, but had been turned down. Clarence Fulton indicated that there was a Bachelor Grove Cemetery Association, but no official record appears to exist for the organization.

In researching the history of the legal title to the cemetery at that time, it was determined that title probably still rested in the hands of the descendants of Edward M. Everden, since no deed could be found for the cemetery itself and subsequent deeds and property transfers specifically excluded the one acre cemetery. After clarifying the legal description and boundaries of the cemetery and obtaining clear title through condemnation procedures, Cook County assumed responsibility for the cemetery in about 1976. Through intergovernmental agreements, maintenance of the cemetery is now shared with the Cook County Forest Preserve District. According to an unsubstantiated account, the Chicago Archdiocese of the Catholic Church has also provided some maintenance for the cemetery from time to time on behalf of the County in years past.

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS		
COUNTY DEPARTMENT - LAW DIVISION		
THE COUNTY OF COOK,)	CONDEMNATION
)	
Petitioner)	Case No. 76 L 19294
)	
vs.)	
)	
EDWARD M. EVERDEN, et al.,)	BACHELOR GROVE CEMETERY
)	
Defendants)	

Obtaining Clear Title Through Condemnation - October 22, 1976 - February 18, 1977

In researching local area history, and the cemetery specifically, numerous variations on the spelling of the name of the Grove have been encountered. These variations include Bachelor, Batchelder, Bachelder, Berzel, Petzel, Bachlor, Bachellor, and Batchel. It is now strongly suspected that the original derivation of the name was from the family "Batchelder" who resided in the area at least as early as 1845.

Although Bachelors Grove is the name currently used by the Cook County Forest Preserve District for one of its preserves at 143rd Street and Justamere Road, and the neighboring roadway (which is now gone), it is believed that the "Batchelor Grove" variation is most historically appropriate. It is the version used on the cemetery plat map in the collections of the Tinley Park Historical Society and the original plat for the Village of Bremen from 1853 (the name of the road is known today as Oak Park Avenue).

Today, a section of the Cook County Forest Preserve at 143rd Street and Justamere Road bears the name Bachelors Grove in recognition of the early history of the area. The last remaining section of roadway known as Bachelors Grove Road, which ran between 135th Street and 143rd Street, was closed in December 1994. Cook County and the Forest Preserve District have followed through with their intended removal of the road, and another reminder of this piece of local history will completely disappear in time.



Bachelors Grove Woods - Circa 1990s - Sign Now Resides At The Tinley Park Historical Society